

WAR GAMES..

FOR THIS WE CHOSE A RURAL LIFESTYLE?

A warm, sunny Saturday morning. David, Prairie, and I are sitting at the breakfast table. Suddenly, there is a high, whining noise, getting rapidly louder, and then there appears at the horizon, and I mean low (the hill is just across the road) a large black jet, a war plane. This is followed by two more. They shriek over our house and off into the distance. We've seen them before and have assumed they are from the Strategic Air Command base in Plattsburgh. But this day was marred by eight or ten visits, and many of them entertained themselves by doing maneuvers directly overhead: flying low and sweeping up sideways, circling around. If you've never experienced this, let me tell you that the low altitude and speed they come in at are like something out of Star Wars, and the sound once made me pull my truck off the road, thinking that a wheel had self-destructed.

A neighbor called Fort Drum one day to ask if we really had to have these planes so low, so often. Fort Drum said to call Syracuse. Syracuse said to call Rome. Griffiths Air Force Base in Rome connected them to Boston, who evidently monitors military air traffice in the northeast. Boston said, "What planes?" They knew of no planes flying in our area. So. It was the Russians, maybe??

That sunny Saturday, we also called Fort Drum. One response they gave was, "Well, you know, it keeps the Russians from coming in the back door." Hermon, New York? The second response was that those boys weren't supposed to be up here. The planes stopped.

Now, we all know that various bases have lots of war planes, and of course they're going to fly them. But the low altitudes, frequency, and daring maneuvers have turned it into a searing breach of the peace here on the backroads, and we are allowing ourselves some hope that the commanders have a little interest in keeping decent relations with the public.

People who live close to Watertown listen to LOTS of bombs going off. Sometimes all day. And machine gun fire. Flares light up the sky at night. Though I knew this was the situation in Gouverneur, Balmat, and Fowler, I didn't believe David when he said that the thunder I was hearing all one clear day was bombs. We live sixty miles from Watertown. Last Monday, the windows in our house rattled intermittently all day long, and into the evening. I called Fort Drum--782-6900--and told them I had a complaint, fearing that it would continue and become as bad here as it is farther south where dishes rattling is a way of life. A secretary filled out a noise complaint form and was sympathetic. Two mornings later, an officer called and said he'd seen my noise complaint form and that he wanted to assure me it was nothing Fort Drum was doing. He said nothing they could do on the ground at Fort Drum could possibly be heard in Hermon. He suggested that I call Hancock Field in Syracuse and the Griffiths Air Force base in Rome, because it must be 106 Fighters breaking the sound barrier. I described to him the constant booming, every few minutes, and the lack of airplanes. I told him I KNEW what a sonic boom was--we have those, too. He was sure it couldn't be from Watertown....

It was from Watertown. These people do not comprehend the far-reaching effects of their war games. They actually don't know that they are rattling windows sixty miles away--or maybe they do; I don't know. It is only by our calling and writing to them that they will

be aware that we, the people they are intending to defend, are having our peace broken and our ire raised by their latest purchase of bigger, louder bombs. Maybe they won't listen. They don't have to. They are the military. But wouldn't you rather ask them to before accepting that? And if they have no reason to pay attention to complaints from a citizen and voter, there are people who do. Our local representatives are there to represent our concerns and interests. David Martin's phone number is 379-9611.

-- Valerie Summer

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NEW DEVELOPMENT AT COOP. EXT.

There's a new development at Cooperative Extension that ought to be of significant interest to Rural Life Association members. Nancy Grudens, whom many of us have called on, has finished up her VISTA stint. This leaves no void, however, because Steve VanderMark, who has been with the 4-H program for several years, is assuming new duties at Cooperative Extension as a consultant to home and small commercial vegetable, fruit, and flower growers. (Pete Barney will still be working with some other commercial operations, especially those relating to field crops and small fruits.) He expects to do a lot with small gardens and greenhouse operations, particularly--but not exclusively--in the area of pest identification and control.

Steve will continue to work with the 4-H program half-time. He points out, however, that the two programs mesh very well. In the past, for instance, many programs in plant science presented primarily for youth groups have drawn quite a number of adults, because the subject matter is frequently equally interesting to both groups. Besides his work with the youth programs, Steve's varied background should make him a valuable resource person for the homesteaders and gardeners in our group. Before coming to Cooperative Extension, Steve spent some time as a greenhouse manager in a retail operation downstate. He also taught courses in horticulture and natural resources at Delhi. His educational specialty was entomology with a close parallel in vegetable crops. In the course of our conversation, he mentioned greenhouses several times, and I suspect there's a secret (?) favorite interest there.

Incidentally, he also mentioned that, while open to exploring all alternatives in approaching problems--depending on what's appropriate for the situation, he has a definite "learning toward the organic."

Specific programs for his new position have not yet been worked out in detail. One reason for this is a general juggling of duties at Cooperative Extension. Due to new positions and retirements, two people are left to cover three jobs for the time being. Until a newly vacated position at 4-H is filled (hopefully before September), Steve's time and energy will be stretched pretty far. However, it was obvious from our conversation that he is very excited and enthusiastic about his new job and the possibilities it holds for reaching many more people. Some of the ideas he mentioned included instituting a Master Gardeners Program, which would call on experienced local people to act as resource people in their own localities--sort of a Cooperative Extension extension.